



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Glacier National Park
International Peace Park
Biosphere Reserve
World Heritage Site

P.O. Box 128
West Glacier, MT 59936
www.nps.gov/glac

406 888-7800 phone
406 888-7808 fax

Glacier National Park News Release

March 20, 2003
For Immediate Release
Amy Vanderbilt 406 888-7906
NEWS03-06


It's Not Officially Spring Until 8 p.m. But Bears Are Already Active; *Make Noise, Be Alert, Be Safe While in Bear Country*

WEST GLACIER, MONT. – Spring officially begins this evening at 8 p.m. We can all see and feel the changes; days are longer and birds are returning from their winter migrations. Another local sign of spring in Montana occurred last week when two subadult grizzly bears (probably siblings) were reportedly observed playing in the snow on Snowslip Mountain, at the 6,500-foot level on March 13. Snowslip Mountain is located at the southern boundary of Glacier National Park where U.S. Highway 2 passes through the park. Given this first confirmed sighting of bears this year, officials at Glacier wish to remind park visitors and other recreationists that it is once again time to keep very alert while out in bear country.

Now that bears are active and moving around, Park Superintendent Mick Holm today stressed that all park visitors should be alert for bears and other wildlife while skiing, snowshoeing, bicycling or simply walking along park roads.

"Now that bears are awaking and leaving their dens, they will roam widely in search of food. Be alert for signs of bear activity such as evidence of feeding on a carcass, tracks, trampled vegetation, or droppings (scat)."

According to Holm, "Soon after bears emerge from their dens, they search for winter-killed wildlife and succulent vegetation, the primary sources of much-needed food during spring months for both grizzly and black bears." Visitors are asked to be especially cautious and alert for winter-killed animals that may attract bears or other carrion eaters, and to take the necessary precautions to avoid encounters with bears.



An encounter with a bear feeding on an animal carcass increases the risk of personal injury. "Bears aggressively protect food sources," Holm noted. Females with cubs are particularly dangerous when they venture from their dens with newborns. He stressed, "All visitors should keep alert for any signs of bears, make their presence known, and keep a safe distance from all bears that are observed. DO NOT approach bears under ANY circumstances."


After spending four to six months hibernating, both black and grizzly bears gradually venture away from their den sites. "Those fortunate enough to view females with cubs may be surprised to learn that cubs are two months old when they emerge from the den," Holm explained. Although bears mate in June and July, significant fetal growth does not begin until late fall. This phenomenon is known as "delayed implantation."

Bear cubs are born in late January or early February, weighing one to two pounds at birth. The energy drain on the female from nursing her young is considerably less than if they were born in the fall, he explained. Cubs spend the first two to three months of their lives in the den; therefore, females with cubs are usually the last bears to emerge. Family groups are typically not observed until late April or May.

Holm added, "If precautionary measures fail and a bear charges, bear pepper spray MAY be a good last line of defense. It (bear spray) has been effective in most of the reported cases where it has been used in recent years." However, bear spray is effective ONLY at short distances (10-30 feet) and is adversely affected by wind, cold temperatures, and the age of the product. "Recreationists should take time to become familiar with bear spray, the safety trigger, and its holster. Carefully read instructions and be aware of product limitations." If someone decides to carry pepper spray, it must be IMMEDIATELY available, not in a pack. Pepper spray is NOT a substitute for being observant and following good safety precautions. Holm further noted, "Bear spray has been a highly effective deterrent when used in this manner."

He concluded, "Bear pepper spray is NOT intended to be a repellent, but rather, is designed to be sprayed at a charging or attacking bear. DO NOT apply pepper spray to people, tents, packs or other equipment."

Glacier National Park's bear management program strives to ensure a natural and free-ranging population of black and grizzly bears. One key aspect of the program is the separation of bears from unnatural food. "Human food and garbage are chief culprits in the creation of problem bears. We remind everyone to keep food, garbage, grills, pet food, birdseed, and other attractants stored indoors and unavailable to bears and other wildlife," he urged.



“Whenever someone leaves food or attractants available for bears, they create situations that invite bears to become problem bears which could ultimately endanger someone or cause the bear’s demise.”

Park staff, state, and other federal agencies strive to protect bear populations through outreach, public education, visitor use management -- such as enforcement of regulations for proper food and garbage storage -- hazing, aversive conditioning and/or relocation of problem bears.

Park visitors are asked to report all sightings (or signs) of bears by stopping by or calling park headquarters at 406-888-7800 to report bear sightings as soon as possible. Visitor information is available on the park web site (www.nps.gov/glac/home.htm) by telephone at 406-888-7800 or by stopping at headquarters. Backcountry camping permits as well as information on spring skiing conditions and bicycling and hiking opportunities are available at park headquarters, weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. or at Apgar Visitor Center on weekends from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

-NPS-